

EAST JUNIATA SOFTBALL

Veteran Tiger team has new found confidence

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AT A GLANCE

EAST JUNIATA TIGERS

District 4, Class A

Coach: Joe Schilling, assisted by Neal Wolf and Stephanie Heckenberg
2011: 9-8, 7-5 Tri-Valley League

COCOLAMUS — Two years ago, the East Juniata softball team finished dead last in the Tri-Valley League. Then Joe Schilling took over.

Just one year later, in 2011, the Tigers shocked the TVL and finished third in the league. The Tigers made it to the District 4 tournament, where they were beaten by Northeast Bradford.

Returning from that team? Just about everyone.

East Juniata is losing one player from last year's district qualifying team: Bethany Gilson. Schilling said he will miss her senior leadership, but is looking forward to seeing what his team can do throughout the season.

"Experience wise, we've been a very youthful team and last year we gained a lot of experience and knowledge," Schilling said. "We were preparing for this year last year."

East Juniata features an athletic team led by a trio of seniors in Katie Eichman, Leah Jones and Lisa Benner. Most of the players on Schilling's squad have been getting varsity time since their freshman year.

With the Tigers reaching the district playoffs last year, Schilling said that his girls gained some confidence traveling up to Northeast Bradford for the game. Although the Tigers failed to win, they did see what it takes to get to the next level.

"The girls gained so much knowledge the last two years," he said. "They have a lot of confidence from last year and I'm excited to see what happens."

The Tigers will be leaning on junior hurler Ashlyn Erhardt in the circle. While she

provides the bulk of the pitching for East Juniata, Schilling is also counting on some young, live arms to see some time at the varsity level.

"She's a junior and will take a majority of our workload," he said. "We have three freshman pitchers that we will pull up to get some experience here."

Overall, Schilling believes his team is pretty solid top to bottom. There aren't too many holes in his roster, especially in the batting order.

Most of his starters belted over .300 a season ago and will look to build off that momentum throughout the 2012 season.

"In our lineup, I'm not really seeing a weak spot," Schilling said. "With our lineup last year we led the TVL in extra base hits."

Those extra base hits will be key for the Tigers as they will once again face a tough TVL slate. Last year, East Juniata fell to Greenwood twice and split a series with Upper Dauphin. Schilling sees those teams being the top contenders this year.

"I would assume Greenwood is going to be a threat, along with Upper Dauphin. Newport switched coaches out, but as far as the other teams I don't know," he said.

East Juniata will be pleased if it gets back into the district playoffs. That is a goal for most of the squad. With an all-around slate of athletic players, the Tigers will cer-



Sentinel photo by BRADLEY KREITZER

Members of the East Juniata softball team are, from left, front, Gracen Shilling, Lauren Maguire, Autumn Dressler, Ashlyn Erhard, Kayla Hoke, Katie Eichman, Taylor Marker and Megan Armstrong; back, Lydia Hunter, Courtney Keatts, Lisa Benner, Leah Jones, Hannah Erickson and Meisha Heintzelman.

tainly look to contend for a Tri-Valley League title in 2012.

"All in all I think we'll have a strength in pitching, hitting and fielding," Schilling said. "I'm expecting the girls to do extremely well."

East Juniata opens the regular season with Millersburg on March 26.

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